

# research matters



## How social media-based research is helping us support more consumers

By Alice Brett, senior policy researcher and Farhana Yeasmin, policy research assistant, energy policy team, Citizens Advice



### Who we are and what we do

Citizens Advice is the statutory consumer advocate for energy. This means we monitor suppliers and the energy market to make sure these operate fairly for everyone. The energy market has changed significantly in recent years: whereas there were 13 active domestic suppliers in 2004, now there are almost 70.<sup>1</sup> We identify emerging trends and highlight developing issues to energy suppliers to prevent such issues escalating. We also analyse the market to make sure that regulatory and industry changes are beneficial to all consumers.

### How we do this

Traditionally we have relied on our own anonymised case data for our intelligence, or on commissioned research. Last year we trialled a technology platform called Method52 (developed by CASM Consulting LLP for Demos) to analyse Twitter data. We collect tweets that reference specific energy suppliers, either by their Twitter handle or certain keywords. We have trained Method52 to classify these tweets into categories on the basis of the text they contain. For example, a tweet about an issue with logging on to an energy supplier's website would fall into the 'internet' category. The software uses natural language processing to do this: we mark which category we consider a tweet falls into, and this teaches the program to improve at spotting patterns in the language use associated with each category.

<sup>1</sup> Ofgem <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/data-portal/retail-market-indicators#thumbchart-c23042756505310535-n95432>

## Key learning from using the tool

A challenge for us was looking at the new data differently from our own data. When we first started using it, we tried to map over the categories we use in our other information sets. However, the new data was not the same and we kept finding it didn't work. We had to step back and look at what the data was trying to tell us instead of trying to get the data to fit into what we wanted it to say. For instance, people on Twitter tended to report phone queues, online accounts not working, or engineers not turning up for meter appointments. By contrast, our own data has more personal or complex issues like debt recovery plans, large unexpected bills or needing help with how to switch energy suppliers. This changed what the data is used for: we initially expected additional evidence about known issues, but instead it became supplementary evidence about wider issues or trends.

## How we use what the tool produces

By collecting tweets and analysing them we have monitored real-time issues that could otherwise be slower for us to pick up through traditional data gathering. In an increasingly interconnected world, collecting tweets allows us to understand the different ways consumers are interacting with their energy suppliers and the energy market in general.

**We had to step back and look at what the data was trying to tell us instead of trying to get the data to fit into what we wanted it to say**

This means we can understand not just individual issues, but also consumer trends and behaviour. This is important to help make sure that we represent all energy consumers and understand their experience of the market.

Data from tweets cannot be used in the same way that some of our other data can because of inconsistencies in how the market uses Twitter. However, being able to monitor tweets allows us to present these trends as supporting evidence to discuss issues we notice with suppliers, the regulator and other stakeholders.

## Our conclusions from social media-based research

Expanding our intelligence to using social media has been challenging: identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the data, looking at where it complements our existing data, and admitting where we were wrong or made incorrect assumptions. This has become a useful source of additional intelligence for understanding how all consumers – not just those who contact us directly – are experiencing the market. In the future we'd like to trial more sources of data and re-visit our categories to make sure we're still being guided by the data, not trying to impose what we think the data should tell us.

# Introducing Andrew

**We are very grateful to Sarah Butt of City University for all her skilled work as commissioning editor of Research Matters over the last two years. And now we're delighted to welcome Andrew Phelps as the new commissioning editor. By way of introduction he says: 'I'm a principal research officer at ONS in Newport, Wales. I work within the social survey area, specifically on a large transformation programme that is looking at how opportunities from admin data and online data collection can be applied to ONS social surveys. It's really interesting! Five years ago I moved with my family to Wales from London, where I had been a social survey practitioner since 1997, working at TNS, BMRB, and NatGen. I'm really interested in promoting and learning about top quality survey design, and I've been fortunate to be involved with some of the biggest and best social surveys, and some of the biggest and best social researchers over the past 22 years!'**



# New methods, new ways

SRA chair, David Johnson, considers the rewards of learning and taking on new things.

Hello everyone and welcome to this issue of Research Matters. My first job this month is to introduce to you Andrew Phelps who has taken over as commissioning editor. Hopefully, and assuming you read articles in order, you'll already know a bit about Andrew from page 2, but I would like to welcome him formally to the team and to wish him every success.



If you read my editorials closely, which I'm sure you do, you might be expecting an article from me, which I trailed in the March issue, about the replicability of social science studies. I'm sorry to have to disappoint you but time has defeated me for this issue. So, perhaps, I'll fulfil that promise for the autumn edition.

In my defence, I offer up a new job as the reason for my tardiness. It is one of those opportunities that comes along

occasionally, when you are offered the chance to take on a new role in addition to your own, and to double the number of people in your team with merely the love of your work as the reward! I'm sure that has happened to many of us and, irony aside, I'm really enjoying the challenge of leading the delivery side of a large-scale evaluation and getting closer to the lives and concerns of the people such studies are ultimately trying to support. Although I've been involved in the same project on the analytical side for a while, being responsible for all the practical challenges of project delivery: relationship management; management information and reporting of progress; budgets; trial integrity; data management; contract performance; volumes delivery and so on, is a reminder that complex evaluations are more likely to fail through poor delivery than poor design (though hopefully not as a direct result of my leadership!), and that it is good to keep challenging yourself by learning or taking on new things.

In similar vein, we have a range of articles this quarter about new methods or ways of approaching social research. These cover using social media to supplement traditional methods of data collection; reflecting on the implications of GDPR for re-using data; and exploring new ways of sharing qualitative data. Importantly too, former SRA chair, Patten Smith, provides a timely reminder about some of the challenges in relying on internet-based methods in delivering representativeness.

As well as new methods, we have articles that challenge us to think further about how to best communicate research; broaden access to findings; and write for a public audience. We also have our usual round up of activity across the SRA and book reviews. My thanks, as ever, go to the people who work so hard to contribute to all this great SRA work.

**Until the next issue, happy researching!**

## Social Research Practice: next issue

**Issue 8 is due in July/August**

The overall aim of the journal is to encourage and promote high standards of social research for public benefit. It promotes openness and discussion of problems. It is free to download at: [www.the-sra.org.uk/journal-social-research-practice](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/journal-social-research-practice).

We welcome offers of articles and research notes for future issues. Read the guidelines for authors and download the article template at the link above. If you have an idea of an article or research note but are not sure if it's suitable, please email Richard Bartholomew, the editor: [rabartholomew@btinternet.com](mailto:rabartholomew@btinternet.com)



# GDPR one year on: the implications for repurposing data

By Jane Evans, SRA trustee

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was introduced a year ago. By now, most social researchers understand its implications for collecting data and gaining consent from research participants. For example, most universities and research bodies use 'public task' or 'legitimate interest' as the legal basis for collecting data and obtaining consent to conduct research. When doing 'human subject research' it is a familiar principle to provide participants with a consent form setting out the right to withdraw consent, how privacy and anonymity will be protected, all the ways in which the research data will be used, how long it will be stored for and where.



But what are the ethical implications of GDPR for methods using secondary data, where consent may not be readily available or may have been given for a different purpose?

## Risks of deleting historical data

The concept of historical data does not exist in GDPR if consent to collect the data was not given in line with new GDPR guidelines. Does this mean that because the individuals in a data set did not give consent under GDPR, researchers have to obtain that consent, delete the data or abandon the research?

The Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources (CLOSER) research programme at UCL warns against destroying data. It says

that any data, no matter what it was collected for, can be used for research purposes and still be legal. CLOSER uses historical data such as cohort studies and health records for research purposes, and argues that the risk of deleting data is exemplified by the Home Office's destruction of the 'Windrush' disembarkation cards due to a misinterpretation of the Data Protection Act 1998. As we have seen over the past year, this has resulted in many of the 'Windrush generation' losing citizenship rights, as well as destroying a valuable source of research data. According to CLOSER, GDPR is kinder to research than older legislation, and the Information Commissioner's Office has changed its guidance to say that information can be 'retained indefinitely and repurposed for research in the public interest'.<sup>2</sup>

## The dilemmas associated with case-file data

Patient data is available to researchers in the NHS and universities in an anonymised format. Patients can sign an opt-out preventing their personal data being used for these purposes. As such, researchers working with health records are in a straightforward position. But what about, for example, local authorities' child protection files?

A key principle of GDPR is that 'data collected for one purpose cannot be repurposed without further consent'. Can these files be used to research social care if children are too young to consent and parents cannot be contacted? Recital 4 of GDPR states that 'the processing of personal data should be designed to service mankind'

(sic), and research into these case files may uncover important insights. CLOSER recommends that guidance on data retention and repurposing should be much clearer and a code of practice developed so that valuable secondary data research can continue (Boyd et al, 2018). In the meantime, it is a judgement call for researchers and research ethics committees about whether or not to proceed with valuable research.

## Conclusions

The use of secondary data in a way which meets the conditions of GDPR is likely to remain a topic of debate for some time to come. And yet this type of research is important, including in areas where the data was originally collected for highly sensitive purposes like child protection: sometimes it should be argued that it would be unethical not to do the research because the potential benefits would be lost. It is in sensitive areas of research like this that the real ethical dilemmas exist and there are no easy answers. Each case must be judged on its own merits to ensure that the balance is kept between the legalities of data protection and good research governance.

## Reference

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.closer.ac.uk/news-opinion/blog/gdpr-protection-peril/>

# How good are online panels? Recent evidence on the accuracy of non-random online panels

By Patten Smith, director of research methods, Ipsos MORI

In 2011, Yeager et al published an influential paper in which they compared estimates from nine surveys against benchmark data taken from administrative records and high response rate face-to-face surveys. Seven of the surveys collected online data from non-probability samples; one collected online data from a probability sample panel; and one collected data by phone from a random digit dialling sample. Mean absolute error after weighting was substantially higher for the non-probability online surveys than for either of the probability sample surveys. There was also considerable variability in estimates from the non-probability surveys.



using telephone and two using mixed-mode data collection – and compared results to Australian Bureau of Statistics benchmarks. Their results largely replicated those of Yeager et al: after weighting, the probability survey estimates were more accurate – considerably more so for non-demographic variables – and less variable than were the non-probability survey estimates.

Similarly, MacInnis et al (2018) in the US compared data from a random telephone survey, a random online survey and eight non-probability online surveys to high quality benchmark data. Again, after weighting, the probability survey data were more accurate and less variable than the non-probability survey data. Furthermore, the non-probability survey estimates had not improved in accuracy since the Yeager et al (2011) study.

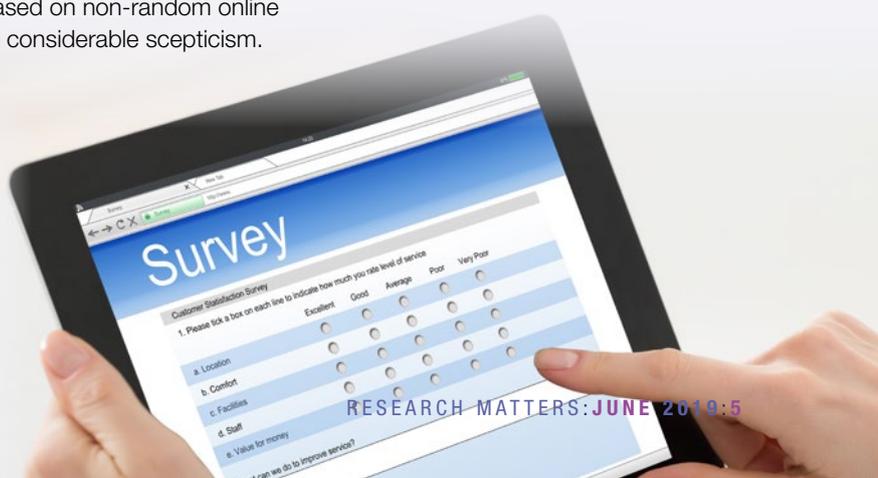
The 2010 AAPOR taskforce on online panels concluded that researchers could not use non-probability online panels for accurate population estimates, and that claims of ‘representativeness’ should be avoided when using these. These recent studies show that little has changed since then and that we should continue to treat estimates based on non-random online surveys with considerable scepticism.

The data for this study were collected in 2004, and since then the market for non-probability sample online surveys has continued to thrive. Perhaps the Yeager et al findings no longer apply, and non-probability online surveys are now as accurate as probability surveys? Two recent studies address this question.

In Australia, Pennay et al (2018) compared data from five non-probability online surveys to three probability sample surveys – one

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# Improving accessibility and awareness of the Scottish Household Survey: using data comics and visuals

By Dr Emma McCallum, Scottish Household Survey project manager, Communities Analysis Division, Scottish Government

## Introduction

The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) team wanted to communicate statistics in an easy-to-follow and accessible way and:



- ▶ Extend the audience of SHS results beyond stakeholders and academics
- ▶ Engage new audiences
- ▶ Heighten media and public awareness of the survey and the wide range of topics it covers
- ▶ Increase audience participation
- ▶ Stem declining SHS response rates

## Collaboration

We engaged with Scottish Government (SG) equalities and poverty teams, alongside subject specialists and attended [DataVisFest](#) (a DataFest fringe event, aiming to develop creative data visualisation concepts, prototypes, and future collaborations between data

collaborators, visualisation designers and the general public). Through this event, we met external academics and a professional illustrator who brought our analysis to life in an easy-to-follow way using data comics: communicating data through visualisations inspired by the visual language of comics.

## Innovation

This was the first use of a data comic to communicate statistics in the SG and an exciting development in disseminating SHS results. It tackled complex cross-cutting issues (such as inequality) with ease by translating key messages from the annual report into simple text.

A novel approach was used to present findings through visualisations, narration, storytelling and characters. Data-relevant illustrations were added which made the pages educational and more accessible. Equality groups (such as age, ethnicity and disability) were represented visually to ensure inclusivity and relatability to the statistics.

The resulting [data comic](#) communicated key SHS statistics in a clear, fun and interesting way. It was published as a PDF, and also, for the first time, as a flip-page version. The use of an animated output, which included realistic audio when 'page-turning', was a unique way to encourage non-specialists to engage with the statistics.

## Dissemination

We published a four-page [data comic](#) in September 2018, covering some headline national results across a range of topics. We used ScotStat (SG statistics publications email distribution list) and Twitter to distribute the data comic widely. Snapshots were tweeted to promote and highlight the key messages within it. Activity around ScotStat SHS tweets were in their hundreds, with almost double the number of #scottishhouseholdsurvey tagged tweets compared to last year. We included questions to encourage Twitter users to engage with our products and make comments.





There was an increase in media attention, with over ten articles referencing SHS data within two days of release. Feedback included: 'a really novel idea, love it', 'you have inspired us!', 'I especially love the SHS comic!', 'it will definitely go a long way towards spreading awareness of the survey in a fun and accessible way'. We are aware of others, including other teams in SG, and the Welsh Government, who are now planning to produce data comics following on from our success.

The data comic has been distributed to all SHS interviewers so that they can understand the data and share this information with respondents. The data comic was so successful that we produced a four-page extension focusing on inequalities, published in November 2018. Given the success of the data comic, we translated our technical survey report '[Scottish Household Survey 2017: methodology and fieldwork outcomes](#)' into a visual and easy-to-read summary '[Scottish Household Survey: behind the numbers, 2017](#)' using some of our comic book characters.

## Implications and reach

Our work has also attracted attention in the wider statistical community. The data comic received special recognition from the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) Presentation and Dissemination Committee](#), for the innovative approach in engaging with citizen users. The SHS team won the [Scottish Government Communicating Analysis Excellence Award 2018](#).

It also contributed to the 'communicating analysis' toolkit which provides guidance on data comic creation, and our work has been made available as an online resource on the effective design of a data comic. The plan is to use this to increase interviewer engagement during annual interviewer briefings.

## Achievements

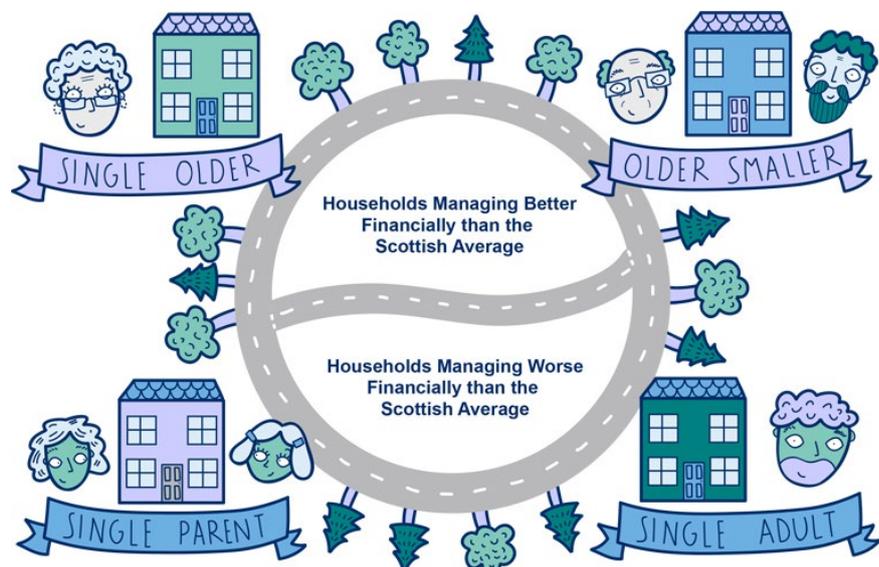
This multidisciplinary, collaborative project has increased innovation in numerous ways and has improved the communication of data throughout the SG and much further afield, to the benefit of statistics users. These achievements are closely aligned with our aims of increasing awareness and accessibility. We fully expect them to have a positive impact on participation rates in future SHS surveys.

We'd love to hear what you think of both the data comic and Behind the Numbers. Email us at [SHS@gov.scot](mailto:SHS@gov.scot)

## Acknowledgements

The comic is an output from the project '[Visualizing Inequalities](#)', funded through an Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) Research Award given to Benjamin Bach, Catherine Magill, Ewan Klein and Dave Murray-Rust, University of Edinburgh. The comic was illustrated by [Katie Quinn](#).

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# Exchanging qualitative data: new opportunities for researchers

By Christina Silver, research fellow, CAQDAS Networking Project, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey; and Daniel Turner, founder and director of Quirkos Ltd



## Why exchanging qualitative data is important

There are more than a dozen software packages designed to facilitate qualitative and mixed-methods analysis, but until now there was very limited ability to move analysed data from one software package to another. Institutions such as universities or public sector bodies usually have licences for one qualitative software package only, making collaboration difficult, and leaving researchers and departments with their work 'locked' into a particular package.

With no universal standard, sharing, archiving and scrutinising analysed qualitative datasets has been practically impossible. This has restricted how researchers can collaborate, how editors and article reviewers can check the quality of analysis, and how qualitative data can be explored. It has also contributed to the perception (especially in the public sector) of qualitative analysis being a 'black-box', seen as unreliable and subjective.

## REFI to the rescue

In March 2019 the first universal standard for sharing, publishing and archiving analysed qualitative data was released. Developed by the Rotterdam Exchange Format Initiative (REFI), the new REFI-QDA (qualitative data analysis) Exchange Format, has major implications for how qualitative research is designed, analysed and used. There have been previous attempts to develop a common exchange format, but this is the first time that there is broad support, and software developers, qualitative researchers, methodologists and teachers have all worked together

to make this happen. In the next few months, more than a million researchers will be able to exchange qualitative data between software packages for the first time. The format is open source, meaning that any software program can implement it, and many more software packages are expected to adopt the standard in the next year.

Users can bring most aspects of their data and analysis together in one file, including their text or multimedia sources, coded segments, frameworks, annotations and memos, links, cases and groups, and author information. This file can be created and imported into any qualitative software that supports the REFI-QDA standard, which by the end of the year will cover nearly all of the major qualitative data analysis packages. This already includes Atlas.ti, f4Analyse, NVivo (Windows), QDA Miner and Quirkos, which have added support as free updates to current versions of their software.

## What it means for researchers

The release of the REFI-QDA Exchange Format for computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) packages allows researchers to:

- ▶ Move their data from one CAQDAS package to another to use different analytic tools or features
- ▶ Collaborate on an analysis, even if researchers or teams in other sectors are using different software
- ▶ Move to an institution that uses different software and continue working with their data
- ▶ Include analysis when archiving and depositing publicly funded research data

- ▶ Widely share data on best practice and evaluation that uses qualitative data
- ▶ 'Show their working out' when submitting qualitative-based research to journal reviewers
- ▶ Teach qualitative data analysis (QDA) by demonstrating how the same project can be analysed in different tools

## An international team

The development of the REFI-QDA Exchange Format started in September 2016, organised by REFI and drawing in a team of international experts, including several members of the SRA. The software packages that were actively involved in its development are (in alphabetical order):

- ▶ ATLAS.ti
- ▶ f4analyse
- ▶ NVivo
- ▶ QDA Miner
- ▶ Quirkos
- ▶ Transana

The qualitative researchers, methodologists and teachers that coordinate REFI are based at the following institutions:

- ▶ Erasmus University (Rotterdam, the Netherlands)
- ▶ University of Surrey (Guildford, UK)
- ▶ University of Quebec (Montreal, Canada)
- ▶ University of Montreal (Montreal, Canada)

Information about the standard, including the full schema, documentation and list of implementing software, is at [www.qdasoftware.org](http://www.qdasoftware.org)

# How to communicate with a public audience

By Kathryn Torney, data journalist and editor at [The Detail](#), investigative news website in Belfast

## Think about your audience at the outset

It's vital to think of your audience at the beginning of your research; not the end. At the same time as you are, for example, setting up interviews, identifying case studies or examining data, you need to plan for wider impact.



Your colleagues, other academic peers and specialists in your field of interest are probably already on board. They get it. But you need to let others know why your work matters. Perhaps you are hoping to change policy, reveal exclusive new material or simply educate and inform. Let us know why we should care.

## Cut down on jargon

That doesn't mean dumbing it down – but write in a way that people without specialist knowledge can understand. Jargon-heavy text is a big switch off. The option of an executive summary is good to have.

## Break up text with visuals

Consider visuals to break up text and draw people's eyes in. These could be charts or tables, strong quotes extracted and highlighted or photography.

I enjoy working with statistics and using them in my journalistic work. Incorporating data sets into your research where appropriate could enable your future readers to delve into figures relevant to them. This allows for a personalised reading of your work.

Let your readers explore using interactive graphics – they could, for example, insert their postcode to see what happens where they live or check out how the issue is affecting people who are the same age or gender as them.

## Vary how you communicate your findings

As well as a traditional academic report, you can communicate your research findings in other ways and to a wide range of people. This could be a press release for media outlets, an eye-catching infographic containing key points that could travel well on social media, a short video, a blog post explaining one section in more detail or weekly newspapers may publish articles if you can relate your findings to their area. Case studies can bring issues to life; striking photography can draw people in in a way that reams of heavy text can't.

## Link with others

There may be an event taking place which provides a perfect backdrop to launch your research. Other organisations may be willing to provide support – this could be a venue for your launch or an audience eager to hear about it. They may agree to share your material on their social media channels. There is strength in numbers.

## Use social media

You may want a short hashtag to bring together social media responses and to encourage discussion and debate. If you do, make sure this is shared and communicated at launch events, in your own social media messages and in your report.



## Offer an exclusive

If it's in-depth coverage you are hoping for, consider offering a journalist exclusive coverage and embargoed access to your report so they can spend time working on their story before it is released into the public domain. Give all journalists plenty of notice – well ahead of your publication day.

## Be selective

Be selective about what you put forward for public consumption. Accept that some things won't be of interest to everyone. Choose wisely and then make every effort to put forward compelling and thoughtful material that people will want to read and will find difficult to ignore.

See pages 6-7 to find out how the [Scottish Household Survey](#) is communicating its findings.



HIV and abortion: some of the infographics used with Kathryn's journalism projects. Design by Chris Scott.

# Co-production and the role of the researcher

By Emilie Smeaton, evaluation manager, The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund is committed to sharing power and ownership. Co-production of research is one of the Fund's means of 'putting people in the lead'. The concept of co-production is not new and has previously been applied in health and social care research. While there are differing viewpoints about what co-production in research is, one definition offered by Involve (2018) is: 'co-producing a research project is an approach in which researchers, practitioners and the public work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of the project, including the generation of knowledge'.



Co-producing research involving those with lived experience improves the quality, credibility and impact of evidence by providing access to privileged knowledge held by those with first-hand experience of the issue or phenomena being researched. However, meaningful co-production that avoids tokenism requires appropriate levels of resourcing and realistic timescales along with careful consideration of how key principles of co-production can be maintained. This can be achieved through sharing power; being inclusive; valuing diverse experiences and knowledge; and building and maintaining relationships. Another crucial consideration is the role of the researcher.

## Insider/outsider researchers

An insider researcher may belong to the group being researched, or have had similar experiences to theirs, or

share their characteristics, for example, ethnicity, gender or sexual identity. An outsider researcher is one who does not share the same characteristics or does not belong to the same group. There are different theories about outsiders and insiders in social research. For example, when an insider undertakes research with those with shared characteristics or experiences, objectivity may be lost. To ensure that accurate understanding is gained, it is appropriate for the researcher to have some knowledge of those being researched. This knowledge may be acquired in various ways including previous experience of working, or carrying out research, with particular groups and/or shared identities or social position. However, if there is some 'inside' knowledge, it is important to guard against over-rapport.

## Managing being on the margins

To guard against the perils of being either a complete insider or a complete outsider, it is useful to adopt a marginal position of 'simultaneous insider-outsider' (Hammersley et al, 1995: 112) to gain access to research participants and guard against over-rapport as this enables creative insight. In reality, managing being on the margins results in the researcher being 'poised between stranger and friend' (ibid: 97). Alongside supporting the acquisition of valuable data, this position means that those participating in the research process are likely to benefit from some shared level of understanding about lives and experiences. This, in turn, builds trust and facilitates engagement in the research process.

## Complications of being on the margins

The position of marginality has its complications as it requires the researcher to manage ambiguity and the uncertainty of a social position on the edge, and to operate in a way that is ethical, and meets the needs of research participants and the aims of the research study. Researchers' relationships to those they are co-producing with are influenced by their identities and cultural backgrounds, and also influence how they position themselves on the margins. This positioning may shift as the researcher may find themselves as an outsider or insider in relation to specific contexts or individuals. The position of being on the margins also both supports and requires the researcher to retain social and intellectual distance for it is this space that enables the researcher to be analytical and to produce research, rather than an account of actions, experiences and views.

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### Further information

National Lottery Community Fund: [www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/](http://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/)

INVOLVE is part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) to support public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research: [www.invo.org.uk/](http://www.invo.org.uk/)

# Making sense of visual digital data

## THE SRA SUMMER EVENT

Wednesday 3 July, 2-5 pm, Local Government Association, London SW1P 3HZ

Digital visual data is a vast resource to be unlocked by research institutes, policymakers, analysts and more, with potential to generate valuable insights for social policy. But despite this it remains relatively underutilised. Expert speakers at this event will discuss how we are getting to grips with this new area, and share the latest thinking and skills that we have to harness and use it.

The speakers at the Summer Event will investigate these issues:

- ▶ Tim Highfield (University of Amsterdam) on analysing data from social media sources
- ▶ Helen Lomax (University of Huddersfield) on analysing changing contexts and practices in digital visual media

- ▶ Christina Silver (Surrey University) with an overview of digital tools for managing and analysing visual material

Join us to get up to date on the issues and debates of visual digital data.

**Booking:** <http://the-sra.org.uk/events/>

**Delegate rate:** £65, or £45 for SRA members

### REPORTS

#### SRA Scotland

By Karen Kerr

SRA Scotland is delighted to welcome Rachel Warren, Ipsos MORI to the committee. Rachel is providing additional support while one of our committee members is on leave. To find out more about SRA Scotland go to <http://the-sra.org.uk/home/sra-scotland/> and follow us @SRA\_Scotland. To find out more about SRA events see <http://the-sra.org.uk/events/> If you would like to get involved with our organising committee, have any suggestions for future events or would like to give us some feedback, please do get in touch with me: [karen.kerr@sds.co.uk](mailto:karen.kerr@sds.co.uk) or 07584 470028.



#### SRA Cymru

By Faye Gracey

We're excited that plans are progressing for the next Wales Social Research Awards (2020), again driven by Rachel Hughes (Sport Wales) and Richard Thurston (Welsh Government), with support from the SRA and others. I'll share more details about arrangements in the coming months, or follow us @SRACymru to be the first to hear. It is lovely to be working closely with the Market Research Society (MRS) again. Do visit the SRA Events webpage to learn about our joint June event (Understanding suicide prevention on the railways – led by Future Agenda). We're grateful to SRA member Fiona McAllister (Beaufort Research) and John Bizzell (MRS) for making it happen. We are always pleased to hear from researchers interested in getting more involved in organising our activities, or simply sharing ideas and feedback. Do follow us @SRACymru to hear our news first. See [the-sra.org.uk/events/](http://the-sra.org.uk/events/) for details of events. If you want to get more involved with our organising committee do get in touch: [faye.gracey@gov.wales](mailto:faye.gracey@gov.wales) or 03000 257459.



#### SRA North

By Leanne Dew

It's been a busy year for SRA North. We ran an event in Manchester on implicit methods, kindly hosted by Mustard Research. We followed this with an evening seminar hosted by QA Research in York in April, where we discussed how social research can help shape the NHS Long Term Plan. The slides are on the [SRA website](#) and well worth a look. We also launched a pilot job shadowing scheme – we'll keep you updated on how it's going. We have recently refreshed our committee membership: if you are interested in getting involved please do get in touch. It's a great way to meet social researchers and shape the opportunities available across the north of England. We'll be announcing future events shortly, so keep an eye out. As ever, do get in contact on [sranorth@gmail.com](mailto:sranorth@gmail.com) or follow us @SRANorth, we love to hear from you.



#### SRA Ireland

See the SRA website for further details of events. Email us on [SRAIreland@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:SRAIreland@the-sra.org.uk) or follow us @SRAIreland.

## A journey through qualitative research

Stéphanie Gaudet and Dominique Robert

SAGE, 2018

Reviewed by Hannah Grene, Barncat Consulting

This book takes a different approach to most similar textbooks for students. As the authors explain in the preface, rather than provide a prescriptive approach to conducting qualitative research, they wrote the book 'as a companion to help you become the autonomous, adventurous, but rigorous qualitative researcher that you can be'.

The result is interesting, rich, but sometimes quite hard to engage with. Chapter one launches straight into ontology and epistemology, explaining the importance of clarifying your epistemological stance before defining your research question and choosing an appropriate methodology. While this is, of course, the logical

commencement of the 'journey', many other textbooks find a way of deferring discussions of theoretical models until much later in the text – and with good reason, because launching straight into a consideration of one's personal ontological and epistemological beliefs seems like a steep learning curve for many students.

The most valuable sections are the three chapters on analysis of qualitative data, which go through two texts step-by-step to give students a hands-on feel for a three-layer analysis that the authors imagine as a palimpsest – because 'a new creation can arise from original materials that had been repeatedly deconstructed

and reconstructed'.

The texts chosen are engaging, and the close analysis is interesting – but it is marred by a frustrating editorial decision not to include the transcripts as an appendix. While this may be a device to drive students to the website – and indeed, many useful resources in addition to the transcripts are available at the associated link – it means that it is mostly impossible to learn from these chapters without simultaneously consulting the web resource.

Overall, this is not quite your standard textbook, and it is suitable, perhaps, for a more advanced student.



## Doing a literature review: releasing the research imagination

Chris Hart

SAGE, 2018, 2nd edition

Reviewed by Dr Asimina Vergou, evaluation manager, Heritage Lottery Fund

It doesn't take long to find out that this publication has had influence in the social sciences judging by its 3,157 citations according to Google scholar. I originally decided to read this book whilst planning to conduct a review on the subject of wellbeing. And more recently I found it useful when I wanted to design a list of criteria to judge the quality of a rapid review (although please note rapid reviews are not quite the same as literature reviews, which the book does clarify).

Chris Hart, a senior lecturer in advertising, says at the start that his intentions are not to provide a detailed, technical, step-by-step guide to conducting a literature review but rather to talk the readers through how

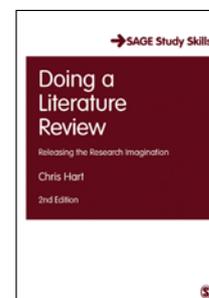
to engage critically with literature and understand its epistemological and ontological underpinnings.

The book is clearly written, and its textbook format has a reader-friendly layout including figures, tables and boxed text highlighting key points, definitions and further references. I found the wealth of examples from different reviews really useful.

It begins by highlighting the value of imagination and creativity in research, setting a welcoming tone. Contents vary from focusing on the purpose of a literature review and how to classify and read research, to argumentation analysis, mapping and analysing ideas, and writing the review. Some of the

useful practical advice that Hart offers includes the distinction between a traditional and a systematic review, and references to checklists and lists of questions readers can use to critically examine literature.

The author identifies the target audience as postgraduates. This might be off-putting for accomplished researchers, especially when you come across dedicated sections on 'what is a Master's'. Having said that, I would also highly recommend it to those academically trained professionals who are looking for inspiration on how to synthesise literature differently and build an argument.



# Integrating analyses in mixed methods research

Pat Bazeley

SAGE, 2018

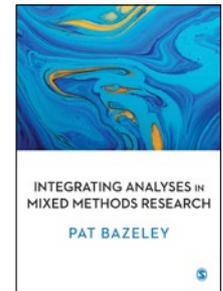
Reviewed by Andrea Jansson, policy analyst, Belmana

This is an authoritative and comprehensive guide, from an eminent research methodologist, about designing and applying mixed methods. Responding to the challenges facing researchers seeking to integrate different forms of data from different sources, Bazeley guides the practitioner through design, planning and data collection, while also offering detailed discussion of data collection and approaches to ensure the integration and analysis are systematic. This discussion is accompanied by useful examples of practical tools and software.

The core strengths of the book lie in its clarity and layout. It is developed to support mixed methods research that makes the most of often disparate data sources, and offers a framework for analysis with clear chapter overviews and diagrams in each section, and a practical guide to core research techniques and best practices in bringing them together. The mapping strategies for integrative analysis strategies are particularly illuminating. The objective does mean that the book provides an overview, rather than detailed discussion, of each research method discussed. This is

understandable as the user would likely be looking elsewhere for detailed information and peer review of their preferred methods. For this purpose, Bazeley also includes useful resources and references to other works for the interested researcher.

This is a valuable resource for the social researcher, policy analyst or policy development professional who is looking for a primer in research methods in a landscape where mixed methods is becoming increasingly important and recognised.



# What are community studies?

Graham Crow

Bloomsbury Academic, 2018

Reviewed by Dean Inwood, PhD researcher, University of Surrey

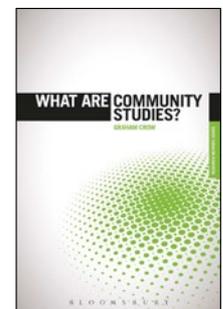
This book provides an insight into community studies, and the past, present and potential future of the field. It is informative, suitable for undergraduates and postgraduates, and useful for academics and other social researchers too. Community studies is a far-reaching and multi-faceted field, and Crow postulates that a community researcher should have many tools when undertaking studies of communities. He examines and approves of ethnographic studies as a way of getting to know the community and those who live within it. However, he reviews a range of studies and states that interesting studies employ

multiple and mixed methods across the qualitative and quantitative spectrum.

Crow views mixed methods as an essential part of a successful community study, with community studies having both theoretical and practical implications. As social researchers, he says that if we want our research to be impactful, we need to ensure the research has both theoretical and practical implications.

Although short, the book provides enough detail for understanding community studies. However, one book cannot capture such a broad area of study. It's clear and concise and an

interesting read; it does not over-complicate the topic; and provides an insight into the debates and methods within the field. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to find out about community studies or to understand how to apply research methods to their work. Within the exemplars, Crow explores how three studies apply different methods and their effectiveness. Overall, Crow provides an insight into community studies, how to do them, how to improve their usefulness (by making them applicable) and how to approach them through multi-methods.



# Books for review



We are always looking for reviewers. Write a short review for us and you get to keep the book. All books up for review are listed below. If you are interested, email [admin@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:admin@the-sra.org.uk) and we'll send you guidelines. Here are a few of the titles on offer:

**Innovation in mixed methods research: a practical guide to integrative thinking with complexity**

Cheryl N. Poth  
SAGE, 2018

**Pioneering ethics in a longitudinal study: the early development of the ALSPAC ethics and law committee**

Karen Birmingham  
Policy Press, 2018

**What is qualitative longitudinal research?**

Bren Neale  
The 'What is?' Research Methods Series,  
Bloomsbury Academic, 2018

**An introduction to data analysis: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods**

Tiffany Bergin  
SAGE, 2019

**What is qualitative longitudinal data analysis?**

Vernon Gayle and Paul Lambert  
Bloomsbury Academic, 2018

# Blurring boundaries and crossing frontiers in social research: SRA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Tuesday 10 December 2019, Royal College of Physicians, London NW1

## Call for workshop presentations

Social research draws on many disciplines and methods, and our practice develops and adapts as it is applied to new or different settings. There's a lot to learn from research taking place across boundaries, and at the frontiers – whether research areas, roles and disciplines, or connecting with multiple audiences. How is UK social research being enhanced by these boundary and frontier crossings?

Last year's conference attracted over 300 researchers from central and local government, research agencies

and institutes, academia, and the independent and voluntary sectors, representing the full range of research methodologies. **Send us your abstract for a 30-minute workshop presentation** to this audience, who want to learn from your practical experiences: the research problems you faced, what you learned, what worked and what didn't, and why. Some theme suggestions to get you started:

- ▶ Qualitative innovation
- ▶ Survey developments
- ▶ Partnerships
- ▶ Impact and influence

- ▶ Co-production/participation
- ▶ Adapting to change
- ▶ Policy evaluation

Each presentation will have 30 minutes (plus five minutes Q&A). Presentations will be paired, and run in parallel workshop sessions. One presenter per presentation will pay a reduced delegate rate of £55.

Submit your abstract on the Word template which you can download from the [SRA website](http://www.the-sra.org.uk).

Deadline for submissions:  
**Monday 8 July**

BRISTOL		
9 October	Research with children and young people	Dr Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham
EDINBURGH		
12 September	Foundations of evaluation	Professor David Parsons
13 September	Impact evaluation: understanding options, choices and practice	Professor David Parsons
19 September	Introduction to data visualisation and infographic design	Lulu Pinney
25 September	Qualitative data analysis	Professor Karen O'Reilly
26 September	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen O'Reilly
23 October	Designing a qualitative study	Dr Karen Lumsden
24 October	Qualitative interviewing	Dr Karen Lumsden
25 October	Conducting focus groups	Dr Karen Lumsden
LONDON		
26 June	Designing a qualitative study	Professor Karen O'Reilly
27 June	Qualitative interviewing	Professor Karen O'Reilly
28 June	Conducting focus groups	Professor Karen O'Reilly
2 July	Questionnaire design and testing	Dr Pamela Campanelli
2 July	Foundations of evaluation	Professor David Parsons
3 July	Impact evaluation: understanding options, choices and practice	Professor David Parsons
3 July	Implementing high quality web surveys	Dr Pamela Campanelli
4 July	Understanding statistical concepts and basic tests	Dr Pamela Campanelli
8 July	Managing challenging interviews	NatCen Learning
8 July	Analysis of qualitative data: approaches and techniques	Professor Karen O'Reilly
9 July	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen O'Reilly
10, 11 & 12 July (three-day course)	Video-making for social researchers	Mark Saunders and Michele de Laurentiis
15 July	Introduction to grounded theory	Professor Karen O'Reilly
16 July (tbc)	Introduction to ethnographic methods	Professor Karen O'Reilly
17 July	Survey sampling and introduction to weighting	Dr Pamela Campanelli
20 September	Introduction to qualitative research	NatCen Learning
25 September	Introduction to participatory action research	Dr Karen Lumsden
26 September	Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research	Dr Karen Lumsden
3 & 4 October	Designing and moderating focus groups	NatCen Learning
24 & 25 October	Depth interviews	NatCen Learning
30 October	Public involvement in social research and evaluation	Dr Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham
9 & 10 December	Basic statistical analysis for social researchers	NatCen Learning
NOTTINGHAM		
18 September	Qualitative interviewing	Dr Line Nyhagen
19 September	Conducting focus groups	Dr Line Nyhagen

Members: £205 a day Non-members: £270 a day.

To get your SRA member discount, make sure to use your promo code.

We regularly add courses and course locations to our programme. Keep up to date [here](#). You can also join our [mailing list](#). If you have any queries contact Lindsay Adams on 0207 225 0695 or by [email](#).

Full details of all SRA courses and booking see our [website](#).



# SRA training can come to you

We run over 100 training courses a year across the UK, covering a wide range of research methods and techniques – see page 15 for a current list.

But did you know that many of these courses can also be held at your premises – and even have the content tailored to your organisation's needs?

A one day 'in house' course starts at a very competitive £2,200 for up to 16 of your staff.

Interested? Call or email Monica Wright, [monica.wright@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:monica.wright@the-sra.org.uk), 0207 255 0695

### Publication dates 2019

SRA Research Matters will be published in **September** and **December 2019**.  
Copy deadlines: **22 July** (September issue); **7 October** (December issue).

### Editorial team

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**Paul Webb**, Praxis Care

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